

Testimony Supporting HB 6633, HB 6781, and SB 4

Will Viederman

February 28, 2023

Honorable Co-Chairs, Representative Luxenberg and Senator Moore, Vice Chairs Representative Khan and Senator Lesser, and Ranking Members Representative Scott and Senator Sampson; and the entirety of the Housing Committee:

My name is Will Viederman, I am the Housing Policy Manager at Elm City Communities/the Housing Authority of New Haven, and I'm testifying this afternoon in support of H.B. 6633, HB 6781, and SB 4.

HB 6781 and SB 4 are good bills, full of strong ideas that would solve real problems. They help us get towards the Connecticut we want—one where everyone can afford their home, where tenants are not at risk of exploitation, and where people have meaningful opportunities to live in any of our 169 towns. We have a desperate shortage of housing at the moment, and until we can get that shortage resolved, it's vital that we protect tenants from eviction, regulate rent increases, increase housing code violation penalties, and fund the systems coordinating planning and housing support.

But fundamentally, if Connecticut is going to fix its genuine housing affordability crisis, we are going to have to increase our housing supply. Vacancies are at an all-time low—as are sales inventories. Tenants are competing against each other for units, bidding up prices and leaving our poorest neighbors out. When tenants have a problem with their home or their landlord, they don't have an alternative—leaving is not an option when there are no available units. Housing costs are so high in Connecticut because we have not built enough housing, at all levels of the market. Over the past ten years, we have increased the number of jobs in the state five times more than the number of homes—and that ratio is higher in the last couple years. Until we build more housing, all the proposals in HB 6781 and SB 4 are simply mitigation, a bucket to bail out the Titanic.

To build more, Connecticut needs meaningful zoning reforms. There is plenty of money to build homes for people—but there are too many laws preventing homes from being built. If Connecticut is going to reverse its devastating housing cost trends and begin to be an affordable place to live, this legislature must step in and refuse to tolerate towns banning everything but large-lot single-family homes. Not only will statewide zoning reforms reduce housing costs, but they will help the state grow economically—and they're politically popular. The main obstacle to Connecticut's continued growth is the affordability of housing. If we don't build enough housing for new residents, the state cannot grow.

HB 6781 and SB 4 will help solve real problems for residents of our state, but HB 6633 is the only bill proposed by the legislature this session that will actually begin to address the fundamental causes of Connecticut's housing crisis. It is zoning, plain and simple, and anyone who says otherwise is misinformed or malicious. If this legislature does not step in and meaningfully reform zoning in our state, we will condemn generations to continued exploitation—and we will condemn our state to stagnation.

I hope this committee will pass SB 4, HB 6781, and HB 6633—and I hope this legislature will plan for the long-term, ensuring a stable future for our state and real opportunities for growth.

Thank you,

Will Viederman